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UNCLAS LAGOS 001475

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/OSAC, DS/IP/ITA
LONDON AND PARIS PASS TO AFRICA WATCHERS
KABUL PASS TO SROSS
DIA/J2 PASS TO GHAYES

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [EPET](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#) [CACs](#)

SUBJECT: NO REPORTS OF AMCITS IN BAYELSA KIDNAPPING

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Reports indicate several expatriate hostages have been taken near Brass in Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. We have NO/NO reports of American citizens being taken hostage, but an American-French drilling venture may be involved. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Preliminary but credible reports indicate several expatriate hostages have been taken by restive community members in Bayelsa State. News reports indicate the hostages work for Conoil Limited, an oil services subsidiary of Conoil Nigeria, the privatized oil company formerly called National Oil. We have also heard, but have not confirmed, that an American-French oil services company, Forasol Drilling West Africa, with offices in Port Harcourt, may be involved.

3. (SBU) Diplomatic and security sources tell us that seven (7) French contractors, one Ivorian, one Croatian and 20 to 50 Nigerian oil workers are being held by community members over a dispute with Conoil regarding its hiring practices. An oil services security manager told Econoff that the governor of Bayelsa State has flown to the area known as Sangana to negotiate with community leaders for release of the hostages.

4. (SBU) COMMENT: Bayelsa State, a nearly homogenous ethnic Ijaw region, generally has not been a locus of oil-related communal violence or disruption. However, this incident serves as a reminder that the estranged relationships between communities and oil companies, and the volatility of the Delta, extend beyond the Warri area. Last November, ChevronTexaco faced a stand-off on one of its platforms off the coast of Bayelsa, and past incidents between communities in Bayelsa and GON forces have been bloody (Odi, for example). The challenge of Bayelsa is that it is even more remote and undeveloped than Delta or Rivers States. Consequently, agitation regarding community development issues will flare periodically. We will keep an eye on this situation to see how the state and federal governments handle this sensitive matter. END COMMENT.

BROWNE